

Tributary Connection Subcommittee of the Restoration Work Group

Chairs: TBD



Meeting, May 12, 2021
2:00 – 3:30
Virtual

I. Welcome and Attendance

The group was welcomed by Isabelle Stinnette, HEP’s Restoration Manager. This subcommittee had not met since 2011. Everyone introduced themselves (attendance below).

II. Mission Statement

Isabelle introduced the history of this group and context of why she wanted to reinstate the group.

The group identified potential goals, including:

- Share project and research updates
- Identifying research or monitoring data gaps
- Working collaboratively on projects
- Link concerns about fish passage with efforts to reestablish tidal flow and efforts to establish terrestrial connectivity
- Sharing best practices and success stories
- Sharing techniques to quantify barrier-removal restoration benefits
- Enhance consistency in the region
- Moving the conversation from assessment and prioritization to implementation
- Create outreach and educational opportunities around this topic to inform the communities of this need. “We need to do a better job of selling these projects.”
- Consider maintenance and stewardship of projects (potentially community based)
- Have this committee be a resource to the community who want info on lessons learned.
 - NJ Dam Removal Partnership is already working to support the community this way.
 - NY has a dam removal guide and some websites but guidance is lacking.
 - Community centered approach is the only way that has worked.

III. Chairs and Membership

Isabelle is looking for two co-chairs to help plan the agendas and run meetings. Please email her if you are interested. Likewise, if you feel like someone is missing from the membership.

IV. Group Updates

NYSDEC/ HR Estuary Program

Megan Lung reported that they are continuing their barrier assessment project. They are hoping to add the North Atlantic Aquatic Connectivity Consortium (NAACC) terrestrial protocol soon in addition to the aquatic protocol. Aquatic protocol training is occurring next week and Megan volunteered to help if anyone needs to get people trained in the future.

Example projects:

https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-01/documents/ny_wappingercreek_1861_508.pdf

<https://neiwpc.org/2020/12/18/new-culvert-constructed-under-plan-developed-by-neiwpc-and-trout-unlimited/>

USACE

Lisa Baron explained how they recently finished feasibility studies that included barrier removals for both the Hudson River and Hudson-Raritan estuaries. These studies included the creation of a model that produced habitat units, which can be used to prioritize projects, combinations of projects and restoration alternatives. In December, five projects were authorized on the Bronx River and Moodna Creek (see links).

<https://nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Restoration/Hudson-River-Habitat-Restoration/>

<https://nan.usace.army.mil/Missions/Environmental/Environmental-Restoration/Hudson-Raritan-Estuary/>

Kyle McKay shared his papers on barrier prioritization methods (links below) and is working on a group within the Corps that focus on sediment management during dam removal. This group is working on a report but has put out a webinar series (link below). He is also working on a study on the costs for dam removals and a method for estimating the costs of future dam removals. He expects to have reports and models on that by the end of the year (website link below).

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/rra.3021>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/rra.3684>

<https://emrrp.el.erdc.dren.mil/webinars.html>

<https://n-ewn.org/people/>

<https://www.cwf-fcf.org/en/resources/research-papers/CWF-WCRP-Guide.pdf>

Save the Sound

Katie Friedman is starting a new role taking their tributary connections work, which has largely taken place in Connecticut and starting a new focus on the NY portion of the watershed. They are also starting work on the Hutchinson Watershed Plan with stakeholder engagement.

Rutgers University

Sara Malone is helping form the coastal resilience plans for a group of municipalities in Middlesex. In stakeholder meeting, people keep bringing up the effect that undersized culverts have on resilience. Municipalities are having trouble securing permits and funding to both maintain and enlarge culverts.

Emelie Einhorn shared that they will be partnering with NY-NJ HEP to assess over 350 crossings using the NAACC protocols over the next two years.

Montclair University

David Hsu is assessing road-stream crossings with NJDEP's Connecting Habitats Across New Jersey (CHANJ) program in key areas: Bobcat Alley, High Mountain and the Sourlands. They have surveyed over 200 sites and trained people in the NAACC Protocols. They are happy to collaborate.

Nature Conservancy

Beth Styler Barry is working on several dam removals in the Delaware watershed. She also helps to organize the NJ Statewide Dam Removal Partnership, a group of agencies and non-profits that seeks to demystify the dam removal process for interested dam owners and others.

NJdams.org

BioHabitats

Laura Wildman is working on several projects related to connectivity:

- Developing a training program on dam removal for the World Wildlife Fund
- Organizing her own permitting guidelines based on her years of experience in barrier removal
- Fleshing out an Environmental DNA (EDNA) and connectivity research project
- Develop a stream morphology curriculum for middle and high-schoolers

- Working in other parts of the country on design-build projects, a potentially cost-saving method where the designer and contractor work together on the project at the same time.

*Chat notes that others are also working on EDNA studies:

<https://www.epa.gov/innovation/detecting-sensitive-aquatic-species-using-environmental-dna>

USEPA

Jacklyn Woollard is working in a tidal restrictions workgroup within EPA. She is also the grant manager for several EPA grant opportunities that may fund stream projects. The grants are not focused on implementation but rather, monitoring and assessment, research or pilot projects.

NYC Parks and Recreation

Jamie Ong reported on Parks efforts on stocking river herring the Bronx River, partnering with Seatuck Environmental Association for a fish passage project at Aurora Pond in Queens, an assessment of the fishway at the 182 street dam on the Bronx River and dam removal at the Bronx Zoo. This last project is comparing alternatives between a fishway and dam removal, the latter option being resisted by the property owner due to a cultural affinity to the waterfall.

*The group concurs that this cultural affinity to dams is a large communication problem for which we may devote future meeting time.

NY-NJ HEP

HEP has been working in coastal NJ on assessing road stream crossing and prioritizing restoration of the problematic bridges and culverts; more here

<https://www.hudsonriver.org/article/actcri>. This past year HEP won an EPA Coastal Watershed Grant administered by Restore Americas Estuaries (RAE) and will be partnering with Rutgers University to assess over 350 crossings in the Lower Raritan. <https://estuaries.org/initiatives/watershedgrants/2020-nep-cwg/>

V. New Business and (Very) Old Business (15 minutes)

Relevant topics and issues that the group thinks we could address in future meetings include:

- Outreach or policy levers that can be utilized to make dam owners consider removal
- Sediment management behind dams
- Opportunity to remove high-hazard dams
- Connecting with the transportation sector
- Connecting to historical preservation groups; their lack of inventory may be an opportunity to connect

- Working with the community to educate on the conservation value of dam removal
- Barrier removal implementation
- Funding?

VI. Attendance

Beth Styler Barry, The Nature Conservancy

David Hsu, Montclair University

Emelie Einhorn, Rutgers University

Isabelle Stinnette, HEP

Jaclyn Woollard, USEPA

Jamie Ong, NYC Parks

Katie Friedman, Save the Sound

Kyle McKay, USACE

Laura Wildman, BioHabitats

Lingard Knutson, USEPA

Lisa Baron, USACE

Megan Lung, NYSDEC

Rob Pirani, HEP

Sara Malone, Rutgers University

Scott Cuppett, NYSDEC